

**How can I make contact with experienced beekeepers?**

Kentucky has 16 local beekeeping associations, and a statewide beekeeping association. They hold regular meetings and enjoy helping new beekeepers. Contact your State Apiarist to find a beekeeping association near your home.

**How can the State Apiarist help me develop my interest in beekeeping?**

When you want to learn more about your new pastime, the Kentucky State Apiarist (working for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture) can help connect your operation to the state’s information network.

The State Apiarist will...

- inspect your bees and hives for diseases and pests at no charge (schedule permitting), including lab analysis with written reports if needed.
- conduct seminars and presentations and seminars for local beekeepers’ associations and other groups.
- help you maintain contact with suppliers, experts and professional resources for maximum assistance.
- put beekeepers in touch with Kentucky farmers who need honeybees for pollination.

a publication of your  
**Kentucky Department of Agriculture**  
Richie Farmer, Commissioner  
Dr. Robert Stout, State Veterinarian

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# BEEKEEPING in KENTUCKY

*What's  
all the  
BUZZ  
about?*

**Beekeeping can be  
Fun • Profitable  
Educational  
A valuable service**



photo by John Clayton

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**HONEYBEES** can be raised for their delicious fresh honey, their value as crop pollinators, or just for the joy of observing and learning about this industrious, fascinating social insect.

**BEEKEEPING** is fun as a family activity or as an engaging pastime for one, and important too: The bees you raise will help pollinate crops and foods that will keep Kentucky agriculture thriving. Here’s what it takes to get started.

**What kind of time commitment are we talking about?**

**More timeliness than time.**  
Hives need brief inspections and manipulations on a regular basis, though not a lot of time is involved overall. Here’s the general calendar:

**MARCH  
APRIL**

**Gearing up for spring.**  
Hive inspections every two to three weeks as weather permits, for adding hive bodies and performing mite and disease treatments.

**Busiest time.** Hive inspections every one or two weeks, for swarm control, supering, and managing a rapidly growing colony.

**MAY  
JUNE**

**JULY  
AUG.**

**Harvest time!** Hive inspections every two to three weeks. Honey harvest will take part or all of one day during this period.

**Winding down for fall.**  
Hive inspections every three to four weeks. Checking for mites, mite treatments, culling old frames, and winterizing.

**SEPT.  
OCT.  
NOV.**

**DEC.  
JAN.  
FEB.**

**Down time.** Not much to do. Repair and construct equipment, order new packages and queens. Check hives briefly during the first warm spell (over 60 degrees) of late winter.





photo by John Clayton

### Why are honeybees so important?

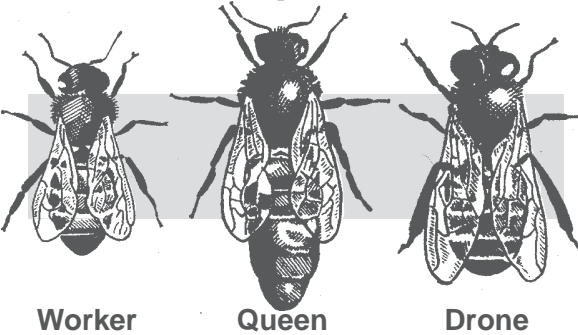
The honey is nice, but the vital function of honeybees is pollination of crops. Honeybees aid in plant reproduction for fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds. Without honeybees, about one-third of all the food we eat would disappear. As fruit and vegetable production increases in the Bluegrass State, so too will the demand for bees.

### What do the different kinds of honeybees do?

Honeybees have an amazing, highly specialized division of labor. The **Queen** lays thousands of eggs and is continually surrounded and fed by young female **Worker** honeybees, who also leave the hive to collect nectar and pollen. The major function of the **Drone** is reproduction. A hive will have one Queen, several hundred Drones and thousands of Workers.

### Where do I buy bees?

From a commercial supplier. There are a number of these companies in the U.S.,



including one in Kentucky. Contact your State Apiarist or a beekeeping association for a list of these suppliers.

### Can I only keep bees in the country?

While many beekeepers keep bees in rural areas, it is possible to have bees in more suburban or even urban areas. Due to the abundance of cultivated flowers and flowering shrubs, these more urban areas can be good locations for hives. However, you should avoid placing a hive near roads, small children, confined animals, and neighbors. If your residence is not a good location, it is often possible to find someone with a better location who will allow you to place your hives on their property.

### How often will I get stung?

Beekeepers are occasionally stung. However, the likelihood of being stung can be greatly reduced by wearing protective clothing including gloves. Also, beekeepers breed varieties of bees that are less likely to sting.

### How much honey can a hive produce?

Production can vary, but 50 pounds a year is considered the Kentucky average. Some Kentucky hives produce much more. Some experience and skill is required for an outstanding good honey crop, so don't be disappointed if your production is initially lower.

### What can I receive for my honey?

In Kentucky a one-pound jar of honey can sell for over \$3.50. Even bulk honey can bring \$1.00 per pound. Demand is high for good-quality, locally produced Kentucky honey.

### What are my long-term prospects?

Once established, a beekeeper can go beyond selling honey and start selling hives of bees, and queens, to other beekeepers. Once you have become an experienced beekeeper, alternative hive products such as pollen and beeswax can be sold. There is a strong demand for these products and they go for good prices.

## From GREEN to GOLD: from MONEY to HONEY

### What will my start-up costs be?

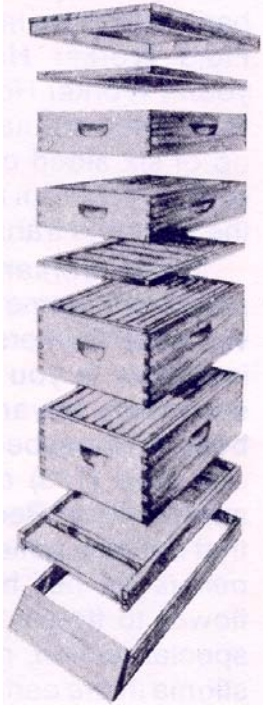
You can get started and maintain a hive of honeybees for your first year **for less than a \$300 investment** in equipment, a hive, bees, and chemical treatments. Once you're started, mite and disease treatments, foundation, and incidentals will represent a very small cost indeed, perhaps as little as \$20 a year. Here's a typical breakdown. Prices are approximate as of 2001. *(Sales tax and shipping not included except as indicated.)*

<b>NEW HIVE</b> from bee supply firm (bees sold separately) .....	<b>\$ 60</b>
<i>includes hive parts and 10 sheets of foundation.</i>	
<b>SHALLOW HONEY SUPERS</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<i>includes 20 sheets of foundation.</i>	
<b>PACKAGE OF BEES</b> (two pounds, from commercial supplier) .....	<b>45</b>
<i>includes shipping, does not include sales tax.</i>	
<b>BEEKEEPING EQUIPMENT</b> .....	<b>106</b>
<i>coveralls, \$38; shielded smoker, \$34; hat or helmet and veil, \$22; gloves, \$6; hive tool, \$6.</i>	
<b>CHEMICAL TREATMENTS</b> , first year (estimated) .....	<b>15</b>
<i>estimate \$20 per year after first year.</i>	

**TOTAL ..... \$266**

### FOR GREATER ECONOMY:

- Reduce equipment costs to **\$66** by purchasing just the basics: Unshielded smoker, hive tool, veil, and gloves.
- Buy an established hive or used equipment from an experienced beekeeper. (Make sure you get healthy bees and quality equipment; bees, and even used equipment, can transmit disease problems.)



*Make sure your hive is a standard size so assembly will go more smoothly. If buying a pre-owned hive, make sure it is as close to the standard sizes as possible. A well-built hive means easier work with your bees.*



## EQUIPMENT LIST

### ESSENTIAL

Veil, smoker, gloves, hive tool, mite treatments.

### VERY USEFUL

Bee brush, spur wire imbedder.

### OPTIONAL DEPENDING ON YOUR STYLE

Coveralls, frame grip, queen excluders.

### FOR THE HONEY HARVEST

Bottles, plastic buckets, filtering cloth, bee escapes.

### CAN BE SHARED FOR THE HONEY HARVEST

Honey extractor, extracting knife.